

rejection of this bill a fortunate incident. (To Albert Gallatiti, 1817. C. VII., 78.)

INVENTIONS.—It has been pretended by some (and in England especially) that inventors have a natural and exclusive right to their inventions, and not merely for their own lives, but inheritable to their heirs. But while it is a mooted question whether the origin of any kind of property is derived from nature at all, it would be singular to admit a natural and even an hereditary right to inventors. It is agreed by those who have seriously considered the subject, that no individual has of natural right a separate property in an acre of land for instance. By an universal law, indeed, whatever, whether fixed or movable, belongs to all men equally and in common is the property for the moment of him who¹ occupies it; but when he relinquishes the occupation the property goes with it. Stable ownership is the gift of social law, and is given late in the progress of society. It would be curious then, if an idea, the fugitive fermentation of an individual brain, could, of natural right, be claimed in exclusive and stable property. If nature has made any one thing less susceptible than all others of exclusive property, it is the action of the thinking power called an idea, which an individual may exclusively possess as long as he keeps it to himself; but the moment it is divulged it forces itself into the possession of every one, and the receiver cannot dispossess himself of it. Its peculiar character, too, is that no one possesses the less, because every other possesses the whole of it. He who receives an idea from me receives instruction himself without lessening mine, receives light without darkening me. That ideas should freely spread from one to another over the globe, for the moral and mutual instruction of man and improvement of his condition, seems to have been peculiarly and benevolently designed by nature, when she made them, like fire, expansible over all space, without lessening their density in any point, and like the air in which we breathe, move and have our physical being, incapable of confinement or exclusive appropriation. Inventions, then, can not, in nature, be a subject of property. Society may give an exclusive right